

Saul's Reign and Rejection

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Date: 25 October 2026

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[0:00] All right, if you've got a Bible, go ahead and open up to 1 Samuel. We're in chapter 11. We're going to be focusing on a large portion of Scripture today, and it's focused on King Saul chapters 11 to chapter 15.

No, we are not going to read all of that. We are just going to take little portions of that. And really what this is, it shows about the rise and kind of the downfall of King Saul in this time.

This is a really fun section of Scripture. If you're new to the church, if you're checking out Christianity, and up to this point you've looked at and just said like, Christians are so boring, following God is so boring, you will find this part of the Bible anything but boring.

It opens up with bullies getting their own comeuppance, which is fun. You see these impossible victories happening, like God moving in people and helping Israel defeat their enemies against all odds.

Moments of singular courage and faith. And then you also get this strange moment of forests dripping with honey. Yes, that is also in here.

[1:05] So, hold on. This is going to be very interesting. But also what we see in all those things is that they're actually, chapters 11 to 15, they give us these two very different pictures of how you and I can relate to God.

In chapter 11, you get a picture of what it looks like of a wholehearted devotion to God and a life lived that way. And then in chapters 13 to 15, you get this picture of what a life lived that looks like half-hearted devotion to God.

And spoiler alert, half-hearted devotion turns out not to be very good for King Saul at all, nor the people that he leads. And the same is true for us today. Jesus didn't die for us to be lukewarm followers of him.

Okay? And we should pay close attention. Because the life of Saul teaches us something. Right? And we too, just like Saul, we can drift into being nominal Christians, nominal disciples.

And there is a danger here. Like the Apostle John writes to the various churches in the book of Revelations, and he says, hey, you're doing this well, but I'm going to warn you, you're drifting into mediocrity over here.

[2:16] If you don't change your ways, it's not going to go well. So warnings. Like God both loves us, but he calls us into following him wholeheartedly. So let's look at this.

And it starts in chapter 11, kind of like a brand new believer in Jesus. Jesus, man, Saul started out with such passion and commitment. And so a little context before we jump into chapter 11.

Saul has just been anointed king. And most of Israel says, yes and amen, this is good. There are a few exceptions. We see at the end of chapter 10 in verse 27, there's some guys that are a little on the fence that are not sure about Paul.

And they look at him and say, can this man really save us? And that question now is being put to the test by these people called the Ammonites. And what they're doing, these Ammonites, they are threatening some Israelites who live in this place called Jabesh Gilead.

The Ammonites are their neighbors. And these Israelites, they're kind of doing the neighborly thing and say to them, hey, we want to get along. We'd like to live at peace with you all. We know we're different and serve different gods and all that stuff.

[3:20] And it's kind of like when you move into a new neighborhood and you bring your best casserole dish over and you say like, hey, like, let's be friends. And the Ammonites respond, well, we'll give you peace after we gouge out everyone's right eye.

They're letting the Israelites know who runs things around here, who's setting the terms of peace and the terms of the relationship and who's in power. They're saying, hey, we don't want your

casserole dish. We'd rather have your right eye, thank you very much.

Kind of creepy, right? Definitely not the neighbors you want. So real threat here, Jabesh Gilead is, we have to appreciate, they're kind of in a vulnerable and weak place.

And here's why. If you go back to the end of the book of Judges, these people of Jabesh Gilead, they stayed home when they should have joined a fight that all Israel was asked to come out and fight.

And unfortunately, their lack of showing up, their absence is noticed, and it is severely punished because the rest of Israel went out to do battle.

[4:27] Their best soldiers had lost thousands, and so as punishment, Jabesh Gilead lost thousands of their own fighting men. So here we have a weak, decimated group of people needing help.

And a bit of irony, the town that wouldn't join the fight, now they're needing their fellow Israelites to step in and help them. So we shouldn't be surprised if the tribes write back to them, thank you for the offer, good luck.

Let's see what happens. Now behold, Saul was coming from the field behind the oxen, and Saul said, what is wrong with the people? They're all weeping. They heard this news about Jabesh Gilead, and the threat that these guys, the Ammonites, are going to come and just hurt them, destroy them.

And the Spirit of God rushed upon Saul when he heard these words, and his anger was greatly kindled. And he took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hand of the messenger, saying, whoever does not come after Saul and Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen.

Then the dread of the Lord fell upon the people, and they came out as one man. And when he mustered them at Bezek, the people of Israel were 300,000, and the men of Judah, 30,000.

[5:43] And they said to the messenger who had come, thus shall you say to the men of Jabesh Gilead, tomorrow by the time the sun is hot, you shall have salvation. And when the messengers came and told the men of Jabesh, they were glad.

Therefore the men of Jabesh said, tomorrow we will give ourselves up to you, and you may do to us whatever seems good to you. They're telling this to the Ammonites, right? They're just like, ooh, we know we got a big army behind our back.

All right. And so the next day Saul put the people in three companies, and they came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch and struck down the Ammonites until the heat of the day. And those who survived of the Ammonites were scattered, so that no two of them were left together. And then the people said to Samuel, who is it that said, shall Saul reign over us? Bring those men that we may put them to death. But Saul said, not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the Lord has worked salvation in Israel.

Then Samuel said to the people, come, let us go to Gilgal, and there renew the kingdom. So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal. Gilgal, there they sacrificed peace offerings before the Lord, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.

[6:56] Finally, this is the word of the Lord. And what it is telling us is that wholehearted devotion gets behind God's work of salvation. That's what we see in chapter 11 here.

If you're finding Christianity dull and boring, I'd say to you what I would say to any husband who walks up to me and says making love to my wife is boring, I would say you're not doing it right. When you and I, when we sign up to follow Jesus, you are adopted as a son, you are equipped as a servant, but you are conscripted as his soldier.

We are those who are called to put on the full armor of God and wage war against the spiritual version of the Ammonites and the Philistines. In the New Testament, Paul says that there are principalities and powers, which is a strange thing to translate, but as best we can get as there is a spiritual world behind the world that we see that has very strong entities and beings that rule and they have power.

And then what they do is they construct strongholds and they dominate our lives and they seek to destroy our faith and ruin our marriages and lead our kids astray and fill us with all kinds of things we don't want, like lust and greed and anger.

[8:08] And so they want us to conform us, our hearts and our minds, to live for ourselves and for our benefit. But in Christianity, that has lost the idea that spiritual warfare is a thing and an important thing, it has drifted from the message of the Bible.

And when that happens, it's easy to drift into some unhelpful distortions that overemphasize personal care and well-being or just says, like, the only thing that matters is being kind to others. Now, it's not that any of those things are bad, right? Self-care, caring about our well-being, stewarding our lives wisely and the body that we're in, those are good things. Being kind to others, being compassionate toward others, of course, those are good things.

But it's all about emphasis. If that's all your emphasis is in one or two of those things, it's just an overemphasis. And if that happens, you are going to drift into a high commitment of taking care of yourself, of noticing your needs and making sure your needs are being met all the time.

And you'll have a very low commitment to showing up to love and to serve others. Or if you overemphasize, like, well, God really just cares about me being a nice person to other people, you're going to drift into avoiding calling sin, sin.

[9 : 27] Because that might hurt someone's feelings. It's why the Old Testament stories and its history is so important to us. It's there for us to learn. It gives us spiritual realities.

We look at these stories and we see it worked out in the natural world. And God says, like, you know what? That is a good picture in a spiritual sense of what it looks like to be a disciple of Jesus, to be on Jesus' team and live it out in this life.

It reveals a holy God who cares about our holiness above all things, not about how comfortable we are. And although he is very patient with sinful people, there is a time of reckoning where he will bring righteous judgment.

This warfare motif, let's be honest, it comes across as intolerant and maybe even unlike God to our modern senses.

But if all we have is a Christianity that is all about self-care and kindness, that won't do when Ammonites show up to gouge out your eyeballs. And maybe the Ammonites' moms didn't hug them enough when they were kids and they just need some healing of their inner child.

[10 : 41] Maybe. But also there's some dark spiritual stuff at play. And dark stuff still happens today because of sin. There is abuse of power.

There is prejudice. There's racism. There's injustice. There's sexual libertinism. Just I get to do with my body whatever I want, sleep with whoever I want, and it doesn't matter. And all those things, all the things that we can imbibe and believe and live out in those ways, it has deleterious effects on the people around us.

And it is bad for our own souls, as we're going to find out. Because what is happening is God's image bearers are tearing each other down and disintegrating their own self-worth when we do those things.

But behind that, behind that is spiritual beings with real power at work to deceive and pull us toward the worst version of ourselves. They want to destroy the things that God loves and created because they hate Him.

And they hate the things that He loves. And these same powers are at work here in this chapter that we're reading, exercising their destructive influence over the Ammonites and then the Philistines, as we'll see in the later chapters.

[11 : 52] Those people that stood against God and His people. So God does what God does. Here's the good news. God does what God does. He works salvation. It starts with these Jabesh folks admitting they can't save themselves.

They humbled themselves. They reached out to help. We need help. And they go to the very ones who they had previously wronged. Salvation 101. The one that we need to save us is the very one that we have wronged, that we have done injustice to, that we have rebelled against and turned away from.

And God responds to that humility and contrition. And He responds with mercy and grace. And He says, don't worry, I'm going to fight the battle. And He has. He fought the battle for us and won over the greatest enemies that we have, the enemies of sin and death, the one that we can never defeat. And He did that through Himself, sending His own Son, dying in our place and defeating sin and death by rising from the grave. Salvation belongs to God.

As much as it did back then, it does so for us today. Saul, in this chapter of chapter 11, he recognized it. He said, hey, salvation, look what the Lord has done in Israel today.

[13 : 04] He has worked salvation. Even though God used Him and the Israelites to fight the battle. Church, hint. God uses us. This chapter shows us two ways that we can get behind God's work of salvation.

We get behind it when we let Him use us as His instruments of redemption. Right? We help, we care, we fight for others with prayer, we go to them with the truth of the gospel, we give them the good news that their only hope is in Jesus Christ and we do so because we want to rescue them from the tyranny of sin and death and we know that salvation doesn't belong to us but we know that God uses His people to bring about His salvation work.

He needs His people to get behind His work of salvation. So that's part of it. The salvation He works out that we need to get behind, it's for others and it's for ourself too.

We need to get behind His work of salvation in our own lives. Right? And we do that by forgiving those who have sinned against us. We don't hold their record of wrong, we don't hold them to an impossible standard, we don't try to execute justice for ourselves and that's what is so amazing about Saul in this chapter in verse 12.

Remember the people said to Samuel, hey, we remember some guys that said, we don't like Saul, we don't want him to reign over us, bring those men, let's put them to death. But Saul steps in and he says, no, we're not gonna do that, we're not gonna put a man to death today for the Lord has worked salvation in Israel.

[14 : 33] And so what happens, Saul calls the people, let's go to Gilgal, let's renew the kingdom. And so all the people, even those guys that the first time said, no thank you Saul, don't want him, now they're there.

And they make Saul king. They're one mind, one heart, one people. And they sacrifice peace offerings before the Lord and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.

The mercy and grace, when we are so captivated and recognize our need and dependence on God for our salvation, we can afford that to others.

We receive his grace and mercy and as we have received it as a free gift, so we freely offer it to others as well. Right? Getting behind God's salvation, like I said, it is anything but boring.

People rescued, sins forgiven, relationships healed. And then notice at the end of that, because of that, there is peace and rejoicing. Who wants their life to be marked by joy and peace?

[15 : 34] I think all of us do, right? The problem is, we go about it thinking like, if I just pay attention to myself, if I fight to take care of myself, if I, you know, all the self-care, all the da-da-da-da-da, if I just pursue happiness as I want to, then I will step into peace and joy.

And what we're seeing in this chapter and the rest of the Bible is saying, if you really want to step into peace and joy, you know what you do? You get behind God's salvation, both in your life and for the sake of others. Then you will step into peace and joy.

That is the life where you're just like, this is anything but boring. This is exciting. This is amazing. Reflection. How can you live your life in a way that gets behind God's work of salvation?

I want you to think about that. I want you to think about that this week. I wish I could say that Saul only gets better from here, unfortunately he peaks. He goes from getting behind God's salvation to getting out in front of God.

Suddenly he knows better. So let's jump to chapter 13 to find out the rest of the story and Saul's failure and downfall. And it opens with a new enemy. Ammonites, no more.

[16 : 42] Now we got these guys called the Philistines. Now remember earlier how Saul gave glory to God, to the Lord of Israel for the victory over the Ammonites. Okay.

Let's see what happens in chapter 13. Right. They're facing the Philistines and it says this, Jonathan defeated the garrison of the Philistines that was at Geba and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land saying let the Hebrews hear. I'm going to send out this message. All Israel heard it said that Saul had defeated the garrison of the Philistines. Wait a minute. Didn't Jonathan defeat the garrison of the Philistines? Classic case of stolen valor here.

There's a danger. The slide to half-hearted devotion begins with a desire for your own glory. That's what's happening here. Small little adjustment Saul makes.

[17 : 47] Jonathan did the defeating Saul takes the credit. And if you do that it's only a matter of time where you begin to believe in your own press that you are indispensable that God really needs you.

And when you believe that it opens you up to a host of subtle sins. Instead of being thankful when people are doing well or being thankful when they decide to give us honor we begin to demand it.

We begin to be entitled to being recognized and being thanked. And so when we aren't recognized when we aren't being honored as we feel like we should we start to become a little insecure we start to get a little angry.

And instead of being able to rejoice when other people God uses other people to bring about his salvation when we refuse to step in and give them honor for their contribution instead we become threatened by it.

That's a subtle slide. That's what can happen to our souls. There's another reflection question for you this week. Do you appreciate recognition or do you need it? It's a big difference there.

[19:03] Some tests for your heart. How do you respond when someone else gets credit for something that you did or that was your idea? Have you ever had that happen to you?

I think God does that on purpose to us a lot. What happens in your heart when your hard work goes unnoticed or unrewarded by people? Now I want to say it is good to give honor where honor is due. The Bible says that. But it just isn't good to demand it. It isn't good to demand honor. It isn't good to demand recognition. And we see in Saul what begins to happen to someone when they start taking glory that belongs to God for themselves.

Here's an evidence of needing personal glory. We think our effort can force God's favor. That's one of the evidences when you start to live for your own personal glory.

That is the heart shift that happened in Saul and it all began with him taking some glory for himself instead of giving God all the glory. So back to the story in 1 Samuel 13.

[20:07] Jonathan defeats the Philistine garrison but basically all that does it kicks over the hornet's nest. Philistines hear about it and they're just like alright you want to defeat a garrison?

Well let's see if you can beat 30,000 of us. They got all these chariots all these horsemen and a multitude of soldiers. In comparison to Saul's army they're probably outnumbered somewhere of 10 to 1.

Here's another thing we find out in this chapter. The guys that are hanging around with Saul still they have no weapons. Like the Philistines had set it up where they they had all the blacksmiths the Philistines they didn't let the Israelites have blacksmiths they didn't even have grindstones to sharpen like their farming utensils right?

They didn't get to do any of that. There was no plow there was no scythe to turn into a sword or spear so here we are we have the Philistines with all this stuff of war like ready to go like they have the tanks they have the AK-47s and all the soldiers equipped with it and then here's Israel with the few thousand men in their fists.

Good luck. And so the soldiers of Israel respond like one would in that situation bye. Some people ran and hid in the caves and the 600 that stayed with Saul it says they are trembling with fear Saul is seeing this he is seeing this happen before his eyes but he also knows that God has a plan God had given him some kind of plan and it gets played out later on and apparently God had told him and told Samuel this plan now we don't know the whole plan but we do know that there was an instruction from God as a part of that plan that hey Saul wait seven days until Samuel arrives and he is going to offer a sacrifice so what does Saul do chapter 8 he waited seven days the time appointed by Samuel but Samuel did not come to Gilgal and the people were scattering from Saul so Saul said bring the burnt offering here to me and the peace offerings and he offered the burnt offering and as soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering behold Samuel came and Saul went out to meet him and greet him and Samuel said what have you done it's never a good thing when it starts out that way

[22:32] Saul said when I saw that the people were scattering from me and that you did not come within the days appointed and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash I said now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal and I have not sought the favor of the Lord so I forced myself and offered the burnt offering oh Saul you are so holy nope a lot of I and me in Saul's language if you didn't notice that Saul needs a win he needs the glory he is growing anxious and more fearful everybody is deserting him he needs to get God's favor he needs to soothe himself so he misuses an important religious practice for his own selfish gain and in so doing he commits the sin of presumption it's one of the warnings and one of the things that Samuel calls out on him you've committed the sin of presumption and he did that because he thought if I just presume upon the grace of God

I will earn God's favor I will force God's hand and yes I know I didn't obey but I'm doing the right thing here I'm doing it for the people reflection for you what religious practice or practices give you

an excuse to disobey God's clear commands growing up in my late teens and early 20s just running with the crowd I ran with we were semi-religious grew up in church but started just going buck wild and chasing after the things of this world and so what made us feel good is we would enjoy revelry drinking drunkenness sleeping around but we'd show up on Sunday we'd walk to the altar we'd say sorry and we repeat it again the next week I think there was a

I think there was a country song that kind of gets to that like we sing on the Mondays and cuss on the Sundays cuss on the Mondays something like that it's just like yeah presumption!

Samuel he calls out Saul said but here's the thing a person that begins living for his glory it is hard for them to repent evidence of needing personal glory number two we blame shift when our sin and foolishness is exposed and we see this in chapter 13 and 14 but in 13 look how Saul spins his disobedience he blames Samuel's tardiness I waited seven days he didn't show up he blames the Israelites deserting him they were leaving me what was I supposed to do he blames the Philistine threat they're coming against me like that's all the Philistines cared about just you Saul this happens again in chapter 14 Jonathan with God's favor he kills 20 Philistine soldiers single-handed and God uses this to bring fear and confusion into the Philistine camp so that they start turning on each other the Philistines are literally fighting against one another suddenly

Saul hears this sees it seizes on the opportunity and routes the Philistines with just a few men but just when you think things are going Israel's way Saul clutches defeat from the jaws of victory by making a foolish vow that binds his men under an unnecessary burden verse 24 in the men of chapter 14 the men of Israel had been hard-pressed that day so Saul had laid an oath on them saying cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am an avenger on my enemy so none of the people had tasted food it's like an SEC coach removing all the Gatorade from the sidelines in August Saul wants his vengeance and his glory and makes an already difficult task for his soldiers harder it's kind of shades of Pharaoh when he said you got to make bricks now you're going to do without straw you got to go get the straw for yourself and Saul's folly goes from bad to worse because his son

[27 : 09] Jonathan didn't get that memo and so Jonathan after coming back from raising Cain with the Philistines he walks into a forest as it said dripping honey on the ground right so he's he's like he's like a sumo wrestler that just finished fasting walking into a buffet like he's going to get some right he's going to get some of that honey Paul isn't going but Saul he isn't going to own this foolish vow and back down even when he finds out that Jonathan is the one that had broken his oath instead he doubles down on it and he's going to kill his own son to save face in front of the people and for that Saul loses favor with the people and they stand against Saul in order to save Jonathan verse 45 then the people said to Saul shall Jonathan die who has worked this great salvation in Israel far from it as the Lord lives there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground for he has worked with God this day so the people ransomed

Jonathan so that he did not die Saul's favor with the people is now under threat and here's the problem Saul's pathway to glory his need for glory was dependent on the people's favor toward him and this points to an unchanging spiritual law for you and for me to know whatever you use for your glory whatever you use to bring glory to yourself that's going to end up using you that's never changed it always happens the glory you need will drive you to do things you would never thought you would do and this is evidence of needing personal glory the final point half-hearted devotion turns into pandering to sin in chapter 15 God commands Saul and Israel to annihilate the Amalekites and to devote everything that belongs to them to destruction men women children possessions even their animals everything no spoils of war allowed what God is wanting to do he wants to erase the name and memory of Amalek from the face of existence now side note this is a very severe divine judgment if you have any questions about this about that particular passage I'll be at the front of the service love to talk to you answer any of those questions but we can't stay and dwell on that what we do see here is that Saul half-heartedly obeys and he lets the people keep the best of the spoils of war and Samuel hears about it and he confronts Saul's sin and here's Saul's response in verse 29 he excuses himself he said I feared the people and obeyed their voice here's the dire warning for us Saul's failure here and pandering to the people's disobedience pandering to their sin it cost him dearly instead of obeying God he disobeys God instead of obeying the voice of the Lord he disobeys the voice of the Lord because he rejects it God rejects him as king and he says I'm going to get another king in your place he will obey my voice one who is after my own heart and friends that is the danger of half hearted devotion we think God is going to be okay

with it we think

God is going to be pleased with our half hearted devotion but you know he isn't he really isn't so reflection what is the glory of your life that you are most afraid to lose how is that leading you down the road from obedience to God into half hearted devotion here's the million dollar question for you and for me we all seek glory and we all seek the praise of man we're all tempted to coddle people's sins so they won't leave us they won't unfriend us what is our hope not to fall into a life of half hearted devotion now again this isn't perfection this isn't like oh you better do everything perfectly this is just getting so lukewarm that it becomes very normal and easy to disobey the voice of God and to not seek repentance to not own your sin what's our hope here's the

X factor for you and me friends this is our hope it's not us it's found in chapter 11 verse 6 and the spirit of God rushed upon Samuel on Saul it wasn't what Saul did for God it was it first what is what God did in Saul you and I are doomed to be like Saul like the Saul of chapter 13 to 15 without the spirit of God we're doomed to do that there is no way without the spirit of God in us empowering us enabling us influencing us leading and guiding us there's no way we're not going to just repeat that we are going to live for our own glory the spirit of God is the one who comes in and changes that 2nd Corinthians 4-6 it says we all with unveiled face we're no longer blind we see fully beholding the glory of the

[32 : 33] Lord are being transformed into the same image speaking of Jesus Christ the same image from one degree of glory to another for this comes from the Lord who is the spirit the power of the spirit and the spirit is given to all who believe in Jesus Christ we are those who long for God's glory now am I saying we do that perfectly all the time no but I'm saying man by the grace of God and at work in us and the power of his spirit at work in us we can see that drift and we can get back onto the plan of living for God's glory the Holy Spirit is that he does the work of making us passionate pin on him to live out the great commandment and the great commission to live in wholehearted devotion that gets behind God's work of salvation that is our hope so as the band comes up and we look to respond in a moment followers of

Jesus are going to take communion and the communion stations are at the corners of the room you can get to them but first I'm going to say if you're here and you showed up and you wouldn't say man I'm not a follower of Jesus someone who was searching and you've heard about this this God who works salvation maybe you've come in disenchanted with life discouraged disappointed all the things and you're wondering there's got to be more than this yes come and behold God's glory come and behold the glory of Jesus Christ in his salvation he lived a life you could power and he rose again so that you can believe on him the penalty of sin is paid but you get to live in this spirit filled life to walk wholeheartedly in devotion to Jesus and it begins with a prayer it begins with recognizing that you are a sinner needing salvation there's going to be a prayer on the screen for you to pray and

I encourage you to pray! Come to meet you and say hello and just start you on this amazing journey of following Jesus together it's anything but boring and that's for us too as followers of Jesus it's anything but boring as we prepare ourselves for communion what we are doing is we are going to the table to behold God's salvation these things point us back to his body broken for us his blood shed for us for the forgiveness of our sin our redemption so that we can live for God and live for him you can't earn it it's only received in faith and we live in it with faith we get behind his saving work with faith by grace you are saved through faith and this is not of your own doing it is a gift of God and it is also by grace that we live friends join me in prayer and then you can go to the communion table father we thank you Jesus we thank you holy spirit we thank you for all that you have done all that you are doing in us we pray that you would help us to get behind your work of salvation in our lives and the lives of our neighbors our friends and the lives of our kids and our fellow you and we give you all the glory amen amen